

BB

MOTION

HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

During the past month, downtown Los Angeles received 12.56 inches of rainfall, more than four times its average for the month of February. The rain necessitated road closures and caused erosion, mudslides, and severe damage to the City's hillsides, streets, residences, and businesses. For unsheltered Angelenos, major storms like these can be life-threatening.

Housed and unhoused residents alike Citywide should be able to depend on public agencies before, during, and after major storms to efficiently share accurate information, obtain and distribute resources, and address damage. Among the City's most important resources during storms are Augmented Winter Shelter (AWS) beds and motel vouchers, because there are far more people experiencing unsheltered homelessness than resources to meet the need. In light of these limited resources, the City must ensure that no AWS beds go empty or vouchers go unused, and that we have the capacity to add voucher capacity based on need.

During the storms in the first half of February, more than 13,000 calls were placed to 211LA – a nonprofit organization that operates a 24-hour information and referral hotline – many by callers inquiring about the availability of AWS beds or motel vouchers. Only 5,700 of those calls were answered, and callers faced wait times of over four hours during the peak of the storms on February 4th and 5th. The City allocated 147 motel vouchers to 211LA, while the County added just 225 more. 211LA reports that ultimately, all allocated vouchers were issued, but demand for the vouchers was significantly higher.

Even those who were able to access vouchers were not always able to move indoors: some voucher-holders were unable to access motel rooms during the heaviest rains because outreach teams were unavailable over the weekend, some participating motels were located prohibitively long distances from voucher-holders, and it was difficult to locate clients after they were issued vouchers. Council District 4 heard from multiple people with LAHSA vouchers that they were unable to use their vouchers until the following Tuesday, after the three-day weekend and the period of the heaviest rains. Additionally, vouchers were allocated to 211LA on several different dates and were issued on a first-come, first-served basis rather than being issued to people who had called previously and expressed a need for a voucher.


Information about the availability of shelter beds, motel vouchers, and walk-up beds at temporary shelters operated by LAHSA with assistance from the Mayor's Office and the Department of Recreation and Parks was inconsistent and contradictory across the websites of LAHSA and 211LA. Some resources, such as motel vouchers, are available only via particular modes of communication – such as calling versus using the chat feature of a website – but this is not explicitly stated. Six temporary shelters were opened during the February storms, bringing an additional 459 beds online, but information about walk-up access to these beds was not clearly stated.

MAR 01 2024

City departments, 211LA, and LAHSA all must be equipped to respond appropriately before, during, and after major storms. City departments, County partners, Council District offices, and City residents need a clear understanding of how to respond to major weather events. The City must fully articulate a plan that leverages all available resources and ensures that the most vulnerable are prioritized for assistance.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the City Council instruct the Emergency Management Department, with assistance from LAHSA and 211LA, and in consultation with the Mayor’s Office, to report back within 30 days with a plan to improve the AWS program and better manage weather-related emergencies, including:

- A clear delineation of responsibilities for major weather emergency preparation and response, including which City departments are involved in the decision-making process for AWS activations;
- Identification of communication channels for critical safety information between City departments and non-City entities, including how and when AWS activation is communicated;
- An emergency plan for augmenting outreach or other staffing capacity during periods of AWS activations during weekends and holidays;
- A plan to implement structural, operational, and financial improvements to the AWS program, using recommendations from the 211LA “After Action Report: Augmented Winter Shelter (AWS)” dated May 3, 2023 as a reference; and
- Other lessons learned pertaining to the activation of the AWS program during the February 2024 rains.

PRESENTED BY:  FOR
NITHYA RAMAN
Councilmember, 4th District

SECONDED BY: 

ORIGINAL